



Base warriors head overseas

New deployment center eases transition for Airmen

By Airman 1st Class Patrice Clarke
Public affairs

More than 90 base Airmen enjoyed a streamlined deployment experience Jan. 11 as they processed through a newly-opened facility here to distant locations in support of the Global War On Terrorism.

This was the largest movement of people through the consolidated deployment center since its ribbon cutting Jan. 3.

"This deployment center makes processing easier," said Maj. Ted Lewis, 319th Logistics Readiness Squadron commander. "It allows us to coordinate functions where they need to be, to make deployments happen."

In the past, deploying Airmen and their baggage were processed in separate locations. The new deployment center consolidates these functions at one location to create a quicker, more efficient process.

Deploying Airmen enter the facility, drop off their personnel baggage and enter a supply area where they receive deployment gear based on their destination. After that, they drop off their equipment for consolidation with personal baggage.

From there, Airmen receive briefings from finance and personnel specialists, legal professionals and the chaplain. This is the final stop before departing for their aircraft.

During this time, cargo is marked, weighed and inspected and loaded, ensuring passengers and their possessions are deployed quickly and efficiently.



Photos by Airman 1st Class Patrice Clarke

(Above) Airman 1st Class Andres Dominguez loads a backpack on a cargo truck at the newly-opened base consolidated deployment center. Airman Dominguez was one of dozens of personnel who helped ensure a smooth deployment for more than 90 Warriors of the North Jan. 11.

(Left) Tech. Sgt. John Hagen packs his M-16 assault rifle for shipment while Airman Jackie Vargas distributes ammo.

Keeping KC-135s airborne

Base maintainers work hard to keep 40-year old aircraft in top shape

By Airman 1st Class James Croxon
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Grand Forks Air Force Base KC-135 Stratotanker number 63-7987 first rolled out of the Wichita Boeing plant in June 1963. It has flown over 17,452 hours supporting contingencies from Vietnam to Operation Iraqi Freedom. It was on alert during the Cold War at K.I. Sawyer Air Force Base, Mich. and it's scheduled to support the Air Force until 2040. But how is a four-decade old aircraft maintained as a modern weapon system?

Every year 63-7987 goes into the the base's isochronal hangar (ISO) for inspection, lubrication and repair from top to bottom.

Once in ISO, it is divided into four zones. Zone one is the cockpit, zone two and three are the left and right wings and zone four is the rear of the aircraft. Each zone has different technical orders listing what needs to be done. Ten different maintenance shops then cooperate to get 63-7987 torn down, repaired and fully mission capable again in

only five days.

"We are participating in what's called the 'Lean' program, which helps us to use our time most efficiently," explained Tech. Sgt. Eric Chytka, an ISO inspection craftsman. "If we see something that might require extra work, we hit that first. If we're waiting on a part we move to another area of the aircraft. There is no down time."

By Monday morning 63-7987, scheduled for ISO, has already been prepositioned in the hangar. Wing racks are in position and checklists are in cabinets for the crews to work from. Each zone has all the tools and equipment nearby with aerospace ground equipment ready to provide power as needed.

The Airmen of the maintenance squadron work two shifts with the afternoon shift picking up where

the day shift left off. Even with a large percentage of the squadron deployed, they seldom deviate from the five-day turn around.

When Airmen find parts that need to be replaced, they refer to technical orders to find the part number and order it. "The TOs have about 95 percent of the parts in them," said Sergeant Chytka.

To find information on the other five percent they refer to Mr. Ky Johnson, a Boeing engineer assigned to the base. He has the complete drawings of the aircraft and resources to find those parts.

By bringing different specialties together in one space, Airmen of the 319th Maintenance Squadron are able to do the amazing: tear-down and rebuild the 40-year old 63-7987 to maintain it as a modern weapon system in just five days.



Photo by Airman 1st Class James Croxon

Senior Airman Brandon Giles inspects hydraulic hoses near the landing gear of a KC-135 Stratotanker here. Hard work and creativity allow Grand Forks Air Force Base maintainers keep 40-year old aircraft in top shape.

'Lean' approach cuts fat

In October the 319 Maintenance Squadron here instituted a new program to streamline the aircraft inspection process.

Lean, first implemented by Japanese auto makers, is a philosophy of doing routine processes, especially industrial processes, more efficiently.

For the aircraft inspection process, Lean is implemented through several different methods.

On the first morning of inspection a KC-135 has already been prepositioned in the hangar. Equipment is also already on hand to provide power to the aircraft.

Instead of checking out a tool, working for a moment, checking back in the tool and then checking out another, all the tools needed for a particular job are near the aircraft and ready for use.

This thinking applies to more in

maintenance than just the inspection process.

"If you look around our organization, you'll see Lean implemented everywhere," said Maj. David M.

Haar, 319th Maintenance Squadron commander. "The office staff, maintainers and other Airmen participate in the Lean program.

It basically allows us to use the limited resources we have in the most efficient manner."

According to Major Haar, Grand Forks Air Force Base is the lead KC-135 base for testing of the "Lean" program.

So far Lean has proven it's worth.

According to Capt. Jason Schafer, the 319th Maintenance Squadron's maintenance operations officer, inspections that used to take seven days or more to complete now only take five days or less.

"[Lean] allows to use the limited resources we have in the most efficient manner."

-Maj. David M. Haar, 319th Maintenance Squadron commander

Housing project hits stride

Since 1997, Grand Forks Air Force base has undertaken a program to replace all outdated military family housing units.

Currently, 189 new units have been built and 30 "whole-house" renovations have been completed. In addition, more than \$78 million worth of military family housing construction is still ongoing.

Part of that construction effort includes 50 senior non-commissioned officer units completed in August 2004, while 124 additional units are near completion and slated for turnover to the Air Force by late April. Also, foundation work began last fall for an additional 144 enlisted housing units. Completion of those units is scheduled for spring 2006.

Finally, the \$26.2 million fiscal year 2005 military family housing construction contract, which will add another 90 company grade officer and senior enlisted units, is expected to be awarded this month. Demolition of older units begins in March 2005 to make way for these new homes.

"These new homes have features like those found in new homes found in the local area, including attached double garages, vaulted ceilings, central air conditioning, and extra interior and exterior bulk storage," said 319th Civil Engineer Squadron base project manager, Jeff Regimbal. "Also, as a northern tier installation, the Air Force has allowed us to provide an additional 300 square feet of 'arctic recreation' space within the units because of our winter climate. This feature makes our homes some of the Air Force's most spacious."

Normally, the families in a projected demolition area receive first priority for a new home with the move at government expense. Inbound families are the next priority. If inbound, families can choose to wait for new housing, seek temporary quarters off-base or use the temporary lodging facility on base for a short period of time. Or in most cases, they also have the option of living off base.

"Our goal of great new housing for all residents is in sight," said Regimbal.

